

WSOC-ABC (Charlotte, North Carolina)

The U.S. military funds several NASCAR race teams, with sponsorships that include a \$20-million-a-year National Guard deal with Dale Earnhardt Jr. and a \$7.4-million-a-year deal for Ryan Newman's Army car.

Recently, the military's deal with NASCAR ballooned to an estimated \$100 million, paid for with taxpayer money meant to advertise and market the armed forces.

Earnhardt Jr. recently said the military's role in NASCAR is vital.

"Our sport is really infused with the military, and you see that every weekend," he said.

But with the military reducing spending, Minnesota Congresswoman Betty McCollum is pushing for a bill that would prevent the military from sponsoring NASCAR or any other motorsport in the future.

Charlotte native Lloyd Patterson is a loyal NASCAR fan and also a Vietnam veteran. With veterans' programs facing cuts, he said he wonders why the cuts aren't made to racing sponsorships.

"We need to support our veterans," Patterson said. "We need to look after them."

He added: "I would hate to think that the U.S. government would have to support a private entity. What's next? Baseball? Football?"

Channel 9 took his concern to North Carolina Sen. Richard Burr, who said sponsoring NASCAR teams helps the Charlotte area economy by keeping race teams at work.

Burr said he thinks the military is using its share of marketing money wisely.

"That the cost of an all-volunteer force," Burr said. "(It) means that you do have to market (and) you do have to recruit."

"Should there be a limit on how much money can be spent?" Eyewitness News anchor Blair Miller asked.

"I don't believe we can run their marketing budget for them," Burr said. "I believe they have the best finger on the pulse of what it takes to recruit and retain the best and the brightest."

The Army said its research shows that motorsports marketing last year brought in 150,000 leads for possible recruits. Of those, 46,000 came from NASCAR.

PDF: NASCAR Marketing Statistics

One marketing expert estimates the \$20 million spent on a NASCAR team like Dale Earnhardt Jr.'s each year could also be used on 10 commercials during a Super Bowl.

NASCAR executive Marcus Jadotte has been involved in many of the discussions in Washington involving military funding and NASCAR teams. He said, in some ways, NASCAR has been singled out by lawmakers because the military pays for advertising in many ways, not just racing.

"A small share of those advertising dollars are spent on NASCAR," Jadotte said. "But they're

also spent on advertising platforms, print, television (and) radio -- NASCAR is certainly a part of that."

McCollum has tried to prevent the military from sponsoring NASCAR before. A recent bill failed, but she's hoping this time around, with a more comprehensive bill, it will pass.